



Victorian

GREENHAM

MEATWORKS MESSENGER



MAY 2011

If there is one thing we can say about predicting the future, it is that you simply can't. Who could have foreseen the massive summer rainfall that caused so much damage? And the same goes for the exchange rate. Parity was a possibility as it kept on rising, but I doubt many expected it to be floating around the \$1.10 of recent times.

OUR PRICES HOLDING

The unfavourable exchange rate is a real challenge for those involved in export, and that means nearly everybody in agriculture.

At the same time though, I'm sure very few of us would have expected US meat prices to keep on rising allowing us to live, albeit uncomfortably, with such a high dollar. It really is an interesting world!

The inevitable has happened with prices taking a hit recently in the saleyards as the effect of the high dollar has taken its toll. But as our farmer suppliers know, we've been able to hold our prices very close to previous levels due to careful management and the strong relationships we have developed with our long-term US customers.

IN TOGETHER

Keeping prices as firm and steady as possible is part of our basic business philosophy. Just as we nurture relationships with our overseas customers, we also work hard at looking after our farmers. After all, we're in this industry together. We need your cattle and you need us to process them and find a profitable home for their meat.

That's what compelled us to act when so many of you were devastated by the floods. We contributed \$50,000 to the VFF disaster relief fund immediately and then devised a plan to generate an extra contribution. The final figure was \$78,810 (full story on the back page).

MISLEADING

I can't let *Meat Worker* go to print without a comment about the antics of our friends at the local saleyards. They have been quoting prices from our ads that in no way reflect the current marketplace. These prices were used merely as an example to demonstrate the effect of curfews.

As always I ask that you give us a call before you sell. We'll give you a straight answer, and even take our scales out to your place and tell you exactly what your cattle are worth before you make a commitment. You can't get fairer than that!

Peter Greenham

SCHOLARSHIP TO JERSEY FAN

For Jon Pearce, of Tallygaroopna, winning the 2011 Greenham Dairy Scholarship was the key that unlocked the door to his dream career.

Jon, 31, was presented with his award at a function in Melbourne recently by Peter Walsh, MLA, Victorian Minister for Agriculture and Food Security and deputy leader of The Nationals.

"It's very exciting," he said. "It's not every day you get a scholarship of \$10,000."

Jon is using his \$10,000 prize to finance studies at the National Centre for Dairy Education Australia's William Orr campus north of Shepparton.

Jon grew up on his parents' farm at Tallygaroopna and has worked as assistant manager in the family-owned dairy operation of Robert, Geoff and Natalie Akers at Tallygaroopna for the past five years.

The farm covers 1000 acres over three blocks and runs 550 cows in two herds – a Holstein herd of 200 head and the registered Loxleigh Jersey herd of 350 head.

Jon said his long-term career goal was to own and operate his own successful dairy farm with partner Shareena Flynn and their daughter, Lexie.

Jon began work on an Advanced Diploma of Agriculture at NCDEA late last month, involving six units of study both on and off-campus.

He completed the pilot diploma course last year and won an award as NCDEA's outstanding student for the year in the northern region.

"I finished the diploma last year and if I hadn't won this I would not be going on to study the next section," he said.

A passionate Jersey enthusiast, Jon is a member of the Goulburn Murray Jersey Breeders Club and assistant sale manager of the Northern Lights Jersey Sale, an annual event staged by the Northern Districts Jersey Breeders Club.

He also acts as co-ordinator of the dairy section of the Shepparton Show, helps in the All-Breeds Youth Camp each year and takes part regularly as a competitor and judge in local shows, on-farm challenges and the annual dairy showcase, International Dairy Week, at Tatura.

Away from the herd, he is a committeeman and former player at Tallygaroopna Football Club.

Greenham executive chairman Peter Greenham snr said it was an honour for the company to be able to make this contribution.

"Last year, on the 10th anniversary of the scholarship program, we contacted all previous winners and it was very encouraging to see them making their way in the industry," Mr Greenham said.

"Most were still in the early stages of their careers, but it was clear they were moving up the ladder and on their way to becoming industry leaders."



EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN PETER GREENHAM (LEFT) WITH SHAREENA FLYNN, JON PEARCE AND PETER GREENHAM JNR.

COWS, HORSES AND ART



COLIN AND MICHELLE GODDEN TAKE OUT A LITTLE TIME TO RELAX. THEY RUN 230 COWS AND THEN HAVE STRONG INTERESTS IN HARNESS RACING AND ART.

When Colin and Michelle Godden want a bit of extra cash, they sell a cow or try to win a horse race.

Colin and Michelle own the 300-acre property Orion Park at Nanneella, running 230 Friesian cows and a collection of horses, all of which have stories attached.

Michelle was born in Corop and Colin in Rochester, one of a family of six children. His dad was a drover for the saleyards who milked 19 Jersey cows.

Colin worked for the Campaspe Shire as a truck driver for 10 years before he and Michelle made the move into dairy farming. They sharefarmed on another property for three years, then Colin and his brother, Brian, leased a place at Toolamba for a further three.

The next move was to their current farm, then owned by Alan and Heather Curnick, where they worked as sharefarmers for 15 years. When Alan decided to sell to move into Rochester, the Goddens opted to stay.

“We owned the cows and thought we might sell up too,” Colin says. “Then James said, ‘one day, Dad, I might want to come here’, so we ended up buying it off Alan.”

Colin and Michelle have one daughter, Holly, 24, and son James, 22. Holly is a qualified counsellor in Melbourne, but is considering becoming a vet. James is a welder who works interstate, but has his home base in a second house on the property.

MORE REDS

The cows are mainly black-and-white Friesians, but Michelle confesses a fondness for seeing a bit of red as well.

“We do AI – probably 200 straws through the spring, but none in the autumn,” Colin says.

“We get 50 red straws each year and have been getting one red Friesian a year, but now, with that factor in the herd, we are getting about 10 red calves every 12 months. There are probably 20 red cows in the milking herd at the moment.

“We rear about 50 replacement calves every year, but during the drought we had to sell them on the overseas market for cash flow.”



COLIN DESCRIBES HIS TRAINING AND DRIVING AS A HOBBY BUT HAS HAD CONSIDERABLE SUCCESS. SWORD OF ORION'S WINNINGS HELPED WITH CASH FLOW DURING THE DROUGHT.

This year, the Goddens have 63 to come into the herd.

“With our replacements, we haven’t had to buy a cow to add to the herd for more than 20 years,” Colin says. “All cows that are culled for old age and mastitis go directly to Greenham.

SAVING TIME

When they arrived, the Goddens, who are long-time Murray Goulburn suppliers, had a seven-a-side dairy and were taking four

hours to milk. They now have a 15 swing-over and the time is down to three hours all up.

“We do about 1.5 million litres a year,” Colin says. “They’ll do pretty close to 7000 litres a cow, with 250kg to 280kg of fat. They do a good job for what they’re getting. We feed about 5kg a day, but if it’s cold they get a bit more.”

TOUGH SUMMER

It’s been a trying summer for the Goddens, as for many others in the district.

Locusts ate their crop of millet in December, then the January floods submerged part of the farm, with water covering the driveway, lapping the main house, turning the second house into an island and drowning two-thirds of their 100-acre paddock.

“To get from our house to the dairy, we had to wade through waist-deep water,” Michelle says. “The tanker didn’t pick us up for two days.”

Colin says that, during the drought, they used to buy in about 400 tonnes of dry matter and get in plenty of pit silage.

“This year, we’ve minimised the silage hoping to grow millet and ryegrass, but have had to buy a bit of lucerne hay here and there because of the season,” he says.

“We probably feed a tonne of grain per cow, so we’d use 230 tonnes a year. And we’ll do it again this year.

STRAIGHT TO GREENHAM

“I don’t think I’ve sold a cow in the market for 15 years – we just go straight to Greenham. We go to the calf market

in Rochy when the calves are going, and Elders comes for the young stuff for the boat, but cows-wise, we go to Greenham.

"They'll come and pick 'em up or we just take 'em over, drop 'em off and say g'day to whoever's there. Bruce Childs might be there, or Danny (Sinclair). They're easy, handy and convenient and the price is always competitive."

Michelle says Greenham has been "very, very good".

"As a company, when people were selling their herds and reducing their numbers and things were grim, they stepped up to the mark," she says. "They kept the prices up. They're pretty loyal to their farmers, so, in return, you support them."

"We've probably operated the farm on a grassroots level. We're pretty basic farmers, but it works for us. We get a relief milker in if we want to go to the races, but we haven't been on a holiday together for five years."

ENJOYING HOBBIES

Michelle and Colin both enjoy hobbies outside of farming.

"I love art, but hadn't done anything since high school," Michelle says. "I started back at an adult education class because it gave me a break off the farm."

"Every January, I go to Bathurst with the girls for five days and just paint. They all laugh at me and say, 'how many cows did you sell to get here this time?'"

"I'd love to get time to paint here, but we're a bit busy."

Besides the milking cows, Orion Park supports 50 or so rising two-year-olds, 50 or so calves, two brood mares, two yearlings, two racehorses in work and two retired racers.

Colin is a hobby trainer and driver and both he and Michelle are members of the Echuca Harness Racing Club.

"With the horses I've had, I've enjoyed a fair bit of success," Colin says. "Through the bad bit of the drought, I had a very nice horse called Sword of Orion."

"He'd win a race every week – in three months, he won about \$35,000. All up, he won 16 and got 16 places out of 51 starts and prize money of \$75,000, but his racing career was cut short after another horse kicked him in the back leg at Maryborough trots one day."

These days, Colin owns, trains and drives the six-year-old Mister Orion, who's already won \$33,000, and another three-year-old gelding called Lights and Music, co-owned by son James.

He goes to race meetings once a week, training his pacers on a new 800m trotting track beside the main house.

"I don't get off the farm very often because my hobby's here," Colin says.

LOVES BEING AROUND CATTLE

When Kieran Brennan took up the post of trainee buyer at Greenham's Tongala plant, he brought with him a lifetime of learning.

Even so, he's quick to admit there are always more lessons in store.

Kieran, 27, was born in Echuca, but grew up on the 300-acre dairy farm at Tongala owned by his parents, John and Alana, who milk about 250 Friesian cows.

"I left school when I was 16 and worked on the neighbour's farm for 10 years," Kieran says. "That was with Garry Grant, who had 280 cows on 350 acres."

"After that, I went up to the Northern Territory for two months, just for a bit of a holiday, then came back and was offered a job out here in the yards. I came in as a general hand about 15 months ago and have been working as a trainee buyer now for seven or eight months."

LEARNING FROM LES

"I went out with Les Mitchell for a month and he taught me a fair bit, but now we go out on our own."

"We've got four buying centres around and we've got a truck that goes and picks the cattle up on-farm. Back at the buying centre, we weigh them, give them a price and write them out a cheque there and then."

"The furthest we'd travel for the scales is probably 80km away. I'll start at about 5.30am and normally finish around three o'clock."

"I reckon you can never stop learning – you think you've got the cows right, then they come out a bit dear or sometimes a bit cheap. It's just judgment, really."

"I like my job – it's a good job. I just love being around cattle."

OWN FARM

Kieran says his ultimate dream is to one day run his own dairy farm.

"That's probably my number one goal in the future," he says. "That's down the track, but here, just keep learning to buy cattle."

Whatever Kieran's future holds, he will be sharing it with his fiancée, Rhiannon Perry, who works for food processor Cedenco Australia at Echuca. The couple plan to marry in November.

"We bought a little hobby farm about three years ago," he says. "It's just a house and 14 acres, a bit out of Tongala. I'm in the process of lasering the place and, hopefully, sowing it down to lucerne."

"I also run a few Friesian steers on it that I get from my father."

John and Alana are still on their farm, now helped by Kieran's oldest brother, Julian.

COACHING U/17S

Alongside cattle, Kieran's other personal passion is football: he has played mostly for Tongala and has taken up the job this year of coaching the Under 17s.

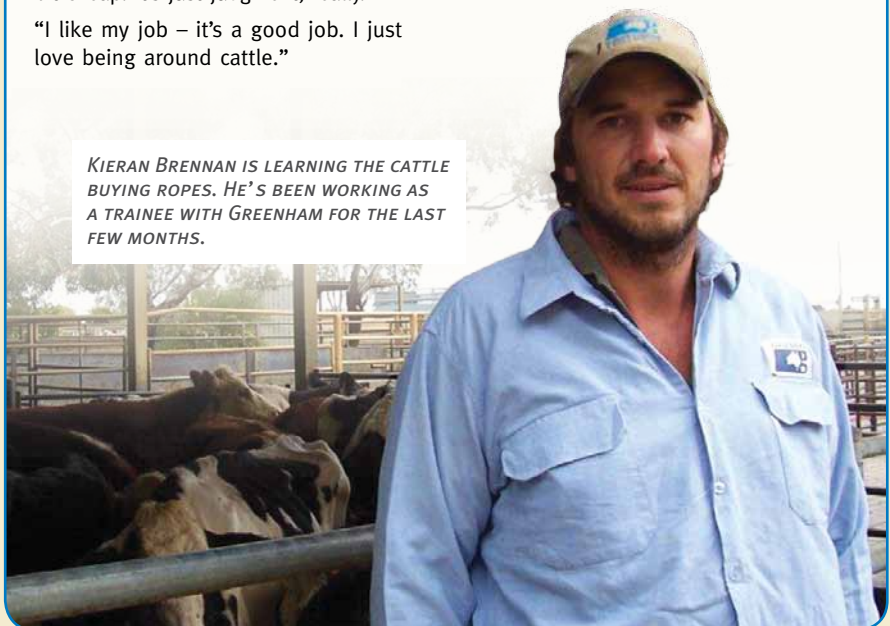
"I've been playing senior football for 10 years," he says. "I went out to Rushworth for four years and won a grand final out there."

"I played at Girgarre last year for one season, but then the thirds coaching job came up at Tongala, so I grabbed it."

Kieran hopes to be playing for a few years yet.

"I'd love to win another grand final," he says. "It's the best feeling!"

KIERAN BRENNAN IS LEARNING THE CATTLE BUYING ROPES. HE'S BEEN WORKING AS A TRAINEE WITH GREENHAM FOR THE LAST FEW MONTHS.



RESPONDING TO PLIGHT OF FLOODED FARMERS

Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu described it as “one of the biggest floods in the state’s history” and senior forecasters at the Bureau of Meteorology agreed.

One of them, Terry Ryan, was quoted as saying it was “the worst flood in western Victoria in their history as far as our records go, in terms of the depth of water and the number of places affected”.

Extremely heavy rain across much of western and central Victoria in mid-January forced thousands of home evacuations and saw more than 50 rural communities seriously affected.

More than 1730 properties were flooded, more than 51,000 hectares of pastures and 41,000 hectares of crops left under water and hundreds of roads were closed.

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries put the total damages bill at somewhere around \$2 billion.

In the face of these devastating losses, Australians showed their customary generosity when a number of major appeals were launched to aid flood victims.

HW Greenham & Sons was quick to respond to the sorry plight of its own flood-hit farmer-suppliers, making a

\$50,000 donation to the Victorian Farmers Federation’s disaster relief fund.

The company then went further, with the announcement that it would also contribute \$10 per head for all cattle consigned to its liveweight buying centres or over the hooks to the Tongala plant.

This scheme ran for seven weeks and contributed an extra \$28,810 to the relief fund.

Executive chairman Peter Greenham said he had been deeply moved by the reports of flood losses heard from field staff.

“These people have endured 10 years of drought and now they cop this,” Mr Greenham said. “We understand some farmers have suffered huge losses – livestock, crops, fencing and equipment.

“We’ve had great support over the years from the

worst-affected areas in the state, from Rochester across to Kerang and further south.

“The least we can do is to provide some assistance in return.”



EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN, PETER GREENHAM (LEFT), HANDS OVER A CHEQUE FOR \$50,000 TO VFF PRESIDENT, ANDREW BROAD.

TOPPING UP THE APPEAL AT KYABRAM

In another generous gesture of support, Greenham has donated \$5000 to Kyabram & District Health Services towards its rebuilding plans for the Sheridan nursing home.

The 42-bed, high-level nursing home is next door to the hospital and offers both permanent and respite care.

The appeal set a target of \$2 million to renovate the third wing of the building, which was originally built in the 1970s. The intention is to provide single rooms with ensuites for 15 high-level care residents.

Work is expected to start next month (June) and take about 12 months to complete.

GIVING YOU THE DRUM ON NVDS

Giving farmers material support and that ‘little extra’ in terms of service has always been part of the way Greenham has done business.

During times of drought recovery and flood, for example, the company has been quick to make donations and to offer practical assistance and encouragement to its suppliers.

The way Greenham has provided farmers in both states with its own National Vendor Declaration forms for the past 18 years is a further instance of that spirit of co-operation.

The company decided to print its own NVD forms as a service to suppliers, reasoning that it would save the farmer money and simplify the procedure.

According to livestock manager Graeme Pretty, it’s all about looking after the producer. “We’re trying to help the farmer any way we can,” Graeme said.

“When we started, we got a legal document gazetted to print our own NVD so we could lower the cost burden on our farmers.

“And our form is still legal, still up-to-date.”

Graeme said the company’s practice was designed, in particular, to help farmers with small lots to sell. When beasts were sold to Greenham, he said, one of the company’s blank NVD forms was sent out for next time.

Now, however, new pressure has come to bear on this service from Livestock Production Assurance, with a strengthening insistence over the past

six months that farmers register with LPA and switch to its NVD/Waybill system.

With the price of the official forms set at \$35 for a 20-page book, an extra cost for suppliers could come into play.

“With the NVD put out by LPA, it costs about a couple of dollars per form every time they sell a beast,” Graeme said.

“LPA has decided people must use their system – unless they do, they could be audited and may lose quality assurance accreditation on their properties.

“Here at Greenham, we will continue to print our own forms and there will be no problem for farmers selling to us and using that form.

“Our NVDs will always be there to make the farmer’s job that bit easier.”